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Human information behaviour in conversation: understanding the influence of informal conversation on learning in a political party

[Susannah Hanlon](#), and [Julie McLeod](#)

Introduction. This paper explores information behaviour in the underrepresented but increasingly important area of informal conversations and their influence on learning within political parties. The application of an extended model on information behaviour in conversation, which arose from the initial research analysis, enabled more granulated interpretation of results. This facilitated greater understanding, through the information behaviour lens, of informal conversations and how they contribute to learning.

Method. Qualitative case-study of a political party.

Analysis. Template analysis was used, followed by the application of the emergent extended model of human information behaviour in conversation.

Results. Characteristics of informal conversation reflected the unique nature of the organisation. The extended model provided additional insights into context, information seeking and knowledge sharing during the conversations including motivations and affective factors, and outcomes from the conversations.

Conclusions. A key reason for engaging in informal conversation was the need to strengthen capacity to influence. Self-efficacy was increased through mutual support and engaging in information behaviours. Application of the extended information behaviour model confirmed that learning occurred during informal conversations at individual and group level. Additional research is needed to test the model further with political parties and their members before extending it to wider applications.

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to share some of the findings and developments which emerged from a recently conducted qualitative case study (Hanlon, [2019](#)), exploring how informal conversation, from an information behaviour (IB) perspective, influences learning in a political party.

The role of informal communication in influencing learning is usefully linked to Ford's (2015) view that information, '*a meaningful pattern of stimuli*' (p. 11), can be converted into knowledge via a process of learning. Learning arguably cannot happen without engaging in some kind of information seeking behaviour with information and knowledge sources, be they people, text or artefacts. In the case of informal communication (an interactive exchange), a communicator could well find themselves being both information seeker and information sharer at different points in the exchange. Robson and Robinson (2013) in their model combining communication and information behaviour theory, bring in these actor roles, but without the possibility that they could both occur in the same person. Dervin (2010) stresses the importance of communication in contributing to healthy information systems. Information behaviour models can be quite linear in their approach, focusing on structured interactions with professional intermediaries or with digital collections. However other information behaviour approaches do incorporate a stronger social construct, including Dervin's (2003, 2005, 2010) structured sense-making approach and Lloyd's (2006; 2009; Lloyd et al, 2013; Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2017) concept of *information landscapes*. Informal conversations engaged in by political party members are arguably part of how they navigate their own information landscape, through its *social modality* (Lloyd, 2017). Context and factors affecting information behaviour feature in most information behaviour literature, including studies of cognitive and affective factors (Kuhlthau, 2004; Nahl, 2007; Wilson, 1981, 1997, 1999, 2016). Savolainen (1995) explored the interplay between these factors (ELIS model) and the impact of affective factors particularly as information seeking motivators (Savolainen, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015). Other factors include roles and tasks (Leckie Pettigrew and Sylvain, 1996; Wilson, 1981, 1997; Walton & Hepworth, 2011); goals (Case and Given, 2016); barriers to meeting knowledge gaps (Dervin, 2003, 2005) or reducing uncertainty (Kuhlthau, 2004), or information seeking itself (Wilson, 1997); perceptions of source utility and credibility (Robson & Robinson, 2013; Walton and Hepworth, 2011); and sense of self-efficacy (Wilson, 1997, Walton and Hepworth, 2011). Types of information behaviour styles and outcomes in the latter part of an information behaviour process (Wilson, 1997; Todd, 2005; Savolainen, 2014) have also been developed. There were few information behaviour studies in the area of politics, apart from Baxter, Marcella and O'Shea's work on politicians' (2016) and Baxter and Marcella's research on voters' (2017) online information seeking behaviours.

Wilson's (1997) model has been a popular starting point in later information behaviour research (Hepworth, 2004; Walton and Hepworth, 2011; Robson and Robinson, 2013). Wilson himself continues to evaluate his own model in the light of later research (Wilson, 1999, 2005, 2016) discussing its hospitality '*to models derived for different aspects of IB enabling the application of the theory to specific cases*' (Wilson, 2016, p. 7). Wilson's (1999) evaluation seeks to widen its original application to reflect the importance of communication in the practice of information behaviour, although his amendment to his model is subject to some criticism (Niedzwiedzka, 2003). Wilson noted that insufficient attention had '*been devoted to the phenomenon of the informal transfer of information between individuals*' (Wilson, 1999, p. 251).

The remainder of the paper discusses research design, initial analysis and the development of the extended model of human information behaviour in conversation. The model is then applied to two examples of informal conversation, yielded from the participant interviews, to demonstrate its function and the additional information that its application brought to understanding information behaviour in conversation. Conclusions are drawn on the influence of informal conversation, from an information behaviour perspective, on learning in the particularised context of a political party, and on the value of the extended human information behaviour model.

Method

The research question of how informal conversation influences learning in a political party, seems particularly timely. Examining this from an information behaviour perspective provided an opportunity to add to information behaviour knowledge in the under-researched areas of informal communication and information behaviour among political party members. A case-study, qualitative approach was used. The participants were members of a political party in an European Union country. It is allied to the Party of European Socialists. This type of party profile was selected due to the varying performance of such parties in the European Union and the sense that some European Union parties with a social democracy outlook need to rethink their strategies to remaining relevant in the 21st century world of social media, misinformation, disinformation and complex global relationships (Luther and Müller-Rommel, 2002; Gallagher, et al., 2011).

Using a combination of snowball and *a priori* purposive sampling, considering variables of age, gender and role, six members of the selected political party were invited to participate in the research and five accepted. Although the sample size is small, two in-depth interviews per participant were conducted yielding rich data for the subsequent study. Crouch and McKenzie (2006, p. 484) argues, '*the labour-intensive nature of research focused on depth can be evoked to justify a small sample size*'. The first interview focused on participant perceptions of *informal conversation*, their preferred term; contextual data about organisational goals, values and leadership styles; and information behaviour related factors of personal goals and values and sense of influence and self-efficacy with information sharing. The second interview, two weeks later, explored examples of informal conversation encountered during this interim period. The accompanying, semi-structured, interview schedule drew from the most common elements found in the information behaviour literature. In addition to the narrative data about the conversations, participants were asked about the conversation contexts; numbers and roles of fellow communicators; their own and others' emerging information seeking goals; motivations for engagement; feelings as they developed in the conversations and perceived mood; the outcome and whether there was or would be any follow-up information seeking or information sharing. Ethnography was not used due to the potential confidentiality of some of the informal conversations, the difficulty of keeping track of what everyone is saying and, critically, the participants understanding far more about the conversations' contexts than an outsider would.

Analysis

King's (2004) template analysis method was applied to the interview data. The codes in the templates for each interview were initially drawn from the interview schedules. This worked well for data from the first interview. The second interview yielded the additional code of *boundaries*, while the original set of codes were reduced to five higher-order codes: context, emerging topics, conversation goals (including information seeking and information sharing goals), follow-up, and affective factors. Reflection on the analysis findings led to the development of an extended model. The remainder of the paper will focus on this.

Extended model

While the research design and preparation of the semi-structured interviews, particularly those for the second interview, did not use Wilson as a starting point, the data analysis results reflected much of what was included in Wilson's (1997) model, though not necessarily organised in the same way, and reflects his model's hospitable nature. Like Robson and Robinson (2013), Wilson's (1997) model became the starting point for the development of a broader model (Figure 1), which emerged from the research data. This approach hearkens to Wilson's (1999, 2016) recognition of the importance of communication, including the informal, as part of human information behaviour. As the model developed, it was no surprise that the influence of Savolainen (2014), Hepworth (2004), Todd (2005) and Case and Given (2016), as applied in the initial research design, resurfaced, in the newer sections of the model.

The model (Figure 1) has four components. The first component, *context*, expands on the topics and situational context codes. The second component, *information exchange*, is influenced by the prior template codes of conversation goals and affective factors, but expands the overall view of what is actually happening in the conversation. Here information seeking occurs through articulating queries in the conversation, which can have the effect of attracting either further queries being asked, or the response of sharing of information and knowledge. Motivation for the information seeking and knowledge sharing is explored including the impact of goals based on physiological, cognitive and affective needs (Case and Given, 2016); and stress/coping, risk/reward and self-efficacy drivers (Wilson, 1997). The impact of affective factors, arising within the conversation, are considered, either as overtly stated by the participant, or as revealed by the participants' own reactions when narrating the details of the conversations. A subsection on types of information behaviour, borrowed from Wilson's (1997) model, is incorporated to reflect the information behaviour processes occurring during the conversation.

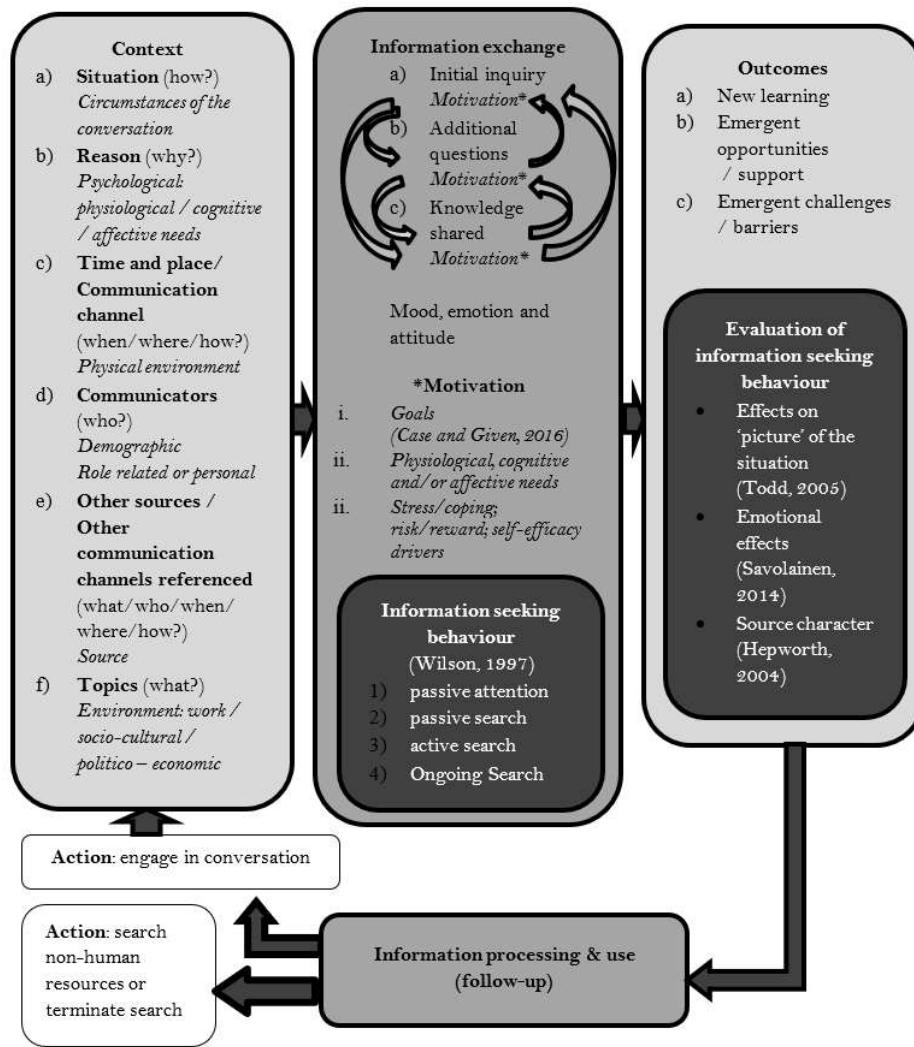


Figure 1: Model of human information behaviour in conversation adapted from Hanlon (2019)

The third component, *outcomes*, is a reflective stage allowing pause to consider the learning that occurred during the conversation and whether any barriers or supports to learning were revealed. Information behaviour effects are also reflected upon, including evaluation of human sources (Hepworth, 2004) encountered in conversation, effects on the *picture* of a situation (Todd, 2005) and emotional effects on future information behaviour (Savolainen, 2014). The fourth and final component, *information processing and use (follow-up)*, is predicated on the same stage in Wilson's (1997) general model of human information behaviour. The term '*follow-up*' is added to reflect the conversational aspect of the information behaviour and its usefulness as an indicator of the conversation's contribution to individual or group learning, and diffusion of learning to other parts of the organisation initial follow-up may occur by engaging in another conversation, conducting individual searches using non-human sources, albeit prepared by humans, or simply taking no further action.

Results

The nature of informal conversation and key contextual issues

The main findings about the nature of informal conversation from the participants' perspectives are that it could occur anywhere at any time, for any length of time, reflecting the nature of the organisation where much of the work takes place outside conventional work spaces and the politics is such a ubiquitous topic in everyday life. The reasons for the informal conversations fell into five categories: social reasons including gossip; sensing other people's views and reactions; safe sharing featuring trust and openness; influencing; and reflecting on values (Hanlon, 2019). Influence was seen as key to whether new learning from informal conversations would be diffused throughout the party. A sense of self-efficacy was identified as important in the process of influencing, as were the qualities of being a good communicator, and having integrity and

sound judgement. Aligning personal, party and electorate values emerged as key topics of concern in response to issues at local, national and international levels reflecting current global political challenges. More detail on these findings can be found in Hanlon ([2019](#)).

Examples of informal conversation and application of extended model

Out of several examples of informal conversations mentioned by the participants in their interviews, nine emerged from the second interview for more detailed exploration. However, for the purposes of this paper, only two of the examples are discussed in greater detail, namely a face-to-face discussion of a novel and an online discussion in a members’ social media forum, on secession. Initial results from the template analysis are shown below in Table 1, while the more granular results obtained from applying the extended model (Figure 1), are shown in Tables 2-6. Further information on the remaining examples can be found in Hanlon ([2019](#)).

The analysis of findings, shown in Table 1, reveals similarities in the geographic reach of the topics, and the experience of value conflicts. However, the goals were different in that the first conversation involved sharing, discussion and confirmation of the challenges of tackling racism, while the second involved honing debating skills and gaining clarity on secession issues. The follow-up element in Table 1 showed that the first conversation resulted in the likelihood of the conversation feeding into policy making on hate crime, while the second conversation led to more robust debates and greater clarity in discussions of motions at the annual conference. Future research design could usefully be developed to include the follow-up behaviour of each person who participated in each of the informal conversation examples instead of only that of the interviewed participants.

Heightened and negative emotions were expressed in the first conversation with enjoyment being expressed in the second. The topic of secession, discussed online, occurred in another of the face-to-face examples, and was similarly debated. Arguably, the online discussion allowed additional opportunities for honing debating skills. The difference in emotions appeared to reflect the topic rather than the mode of conversation. The participant involved, felt that as the members all knew each other, they tended to follow similar courtesies online. Regarding boundaries, the balancing and aligning of personal with party values was challenging in both cases. Only the face-to-face example identified issues of blurring between work and personal life, and between formal and informal conversations. However, these issues resurfaced in the remaining examples (Hanlon, [2019](#)).

Table 1: Findings from initial analysis, adapted from Hanlon ([2019](#))

| | Face-to-face discussion of novel | Online forum on secession |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Context | A lunchtime book-club meeting, in parliament grounds, for members ‘to get to know each other’. Four members attended. | Unofficial, members only (not leadership) social media forum. Evening discussion between 8-9 members. |
| Topics | Racism locally, nationally and abroad | Secession in another European country and whether or not the party should be supportive of this. |
| Goals | Raising issues, sharing experiences, seeking confirmation of concerns and to begin a conversation about tackling the issue at local and national level. | Engaging in debate, observing arguments, sharing experience and knowledge, encouraging and influencing reflection. |
| Follow-up | A further conversation with a family member and intention to bring the learning from the conversation to the participant’s boss, a key policy maker. | The conversation influenced debates at the party’s annual conference with more confident and robust arguments. |
| Affective factors | Sense of a ‘safe space’, expressions of emotions relating to shame, anger, distress, frustration and exhaustion due to complexity and extent of racism. | Refreshing, animated, dynamic, satisfying due to depth of discussion and views being deeply held. |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Boundaries Cross-party nature of the concerns, conflict between voter values expressed in constituencies and party/personal values, blurring between work and personal life and between formal and informal conversations.</p> | <p>Conflicts in aligning personal with party values and in balancing ‘<i>party loyalty</i>’ with ‘<i>ideological loyalty</i>’.</p> |
|--|--|

The remaining tables in this paper are the result of interpreting the findings, after developing the model shown in Figure 1, and reflect the application of three of the four components of the model. The first component, *context*, is represented in Table 2; the second, *information exchange*, is broken down into three sections which are represented in Tables 3-5; while the third, *outcomes*, is represented in Table 6. The fourth component, *information processing and use*, is not examined further as it essentially corresponds to the *follow-up* section in Table 1.

Component one: context

This component is represented in Table 2 and explores questions of *how*, *why*, *when*, *where* and *with whom* the informal conversations took place. There is some overlap with the *context* section of Table 1. However, more detail is given here about reasons for the conversations, related motivational needs, who the communicators are, and whether additional sources were brought into the conversations.

Both informal conversations involved sharing thoughts and reactions, while the discussion of the novel also included the need to get to know each other. In the online forum, the participant mentioned that members already knew who each other were. A physiological need for a break was only a motivating force with the face-to-face discussion. It could occur as a hidden motivation in the online discussion. More information was given about who the communicators were and their characteristics, in the face-to-face conversation than the online conversation. The characteristics and background of the online communicators is less apparent unless people already know this information beforehand. Regarding additional sources, the participant speaking about the online forum, said that although no other sources were shared at that point in time, communicators often brought online sources into their discussions. The scenario is different in the discussion of the novel. Here, the participant verbally shared information from a prior training event.

Table 2: Application of *context* component of extended model adapted from Hanlon (2019)

| | Face-to-face discussion of novel | Online forum on secession |
|--|--|---|
| Situation | Covered in Table 1 (in Context) | |
| Reason | <p>Get to know each other - cognitive and affective needs</p> <p>Take a break - physiological needs</p> <p>Explore race and hate crime ‘<i>in a different way</i>’ - cognitive and affective needs</p> | <p>Discuss, react and respond to issues - cognitive and affective needs</p> <p>Share thoughts and reactions on policy - cognitive and affective needs</p> |
| Time and Place / Communication | Covered in Table 1 (in Context) | |
| Communicators | <p>2 men and 2 women</p> <p>2 from the capital, 1 from the country, 1 from abroad</p> <p>1 councillor, 1 researcher, no other roles identified</p> | <p>Unspecified gender mix and age ranges. 8-9 ‘<i>middle-ranking activists</i>’. All members are known to each other.</p> |
| Other sources / Other Communication Channels | Cross party information event on hate crime on previous day | None on this occasion but journal articles are sometimes shared here |
| Topics | Covered in Table 1 (in Context) | |

Component two: information exchange

As can be seen in the diagram in Figure 1, there are a number of elements to this component, which have been broken down into three separate tables, demonstrating the dynamic nature of information behaviour during conversation. The tables show the capacity of the model, through yielding greater granularity, to facilitate a more detailed understanding of the information behaviour that occurred during the conversations.

The first of these tables, Table 3, focuses on the questions asked during the conversation. It examines the initial query starting off the conversations, and subsequently emerging queries, while also examining motivation for the queries, from goals and needs perspectives. Table 4 then focuses on knowledge sharing responses and their motivation. The motivation aspects in Tables 3 and 4 are considered from three points of view: (i) goals, (ii) physiological, cognitive and / or affective needs, and (iii) stress / coping, risk / reward, and self-efficacy drivers. Table 5 expands the affective aspects, focusing on mood, emotion and attitude aspects of the conversation. The element, *type of information behaviour*, is handled at the end of this table.

Returning to Table 3, the initial inquiry reflects the opening topic of the conversations and the reason, as shown in Table 2, for the discussion occurring in the first place. It is interesting to note that the personal goals are initially quite different in the two conversations. Curiosity is a strong element in the first conversation accompanied by the need to find out other’s opinions and to seek support. The additional questions in the face-to-face discussion became more focused on what members have been experiencing in their constituencies and personally, whereas in the online forum, the questions more overtly reflected the motivations behind the initial question with no noticeable change. The motivation behind additional questions in the face-to-face discussion became far more focused and practical, both in the workplace and on a personal level, such as what to do when encountering racism and how to deal with associated feelings. This also reflected the increased distress (see Table 5) that the communicators were feeling as the racism issues were more deeply examined. The conversations in both cases reflected a need to reduce existing and potential stressors, as well as the desire to increase a sense of self-efficacy.

Table 3: Application of *information exchange* component of new model, focusing on queries and their motivation, adapted from Hanlon (2019)

| | Face-to-face discussion of novel | Online forum on secession |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Initial inquiry | What do the other members think of the book? | What are people talking about today? |
| | | <i>Personal goals</i> – evaluating where members’ goals and party goals align with personal goals. (Potential stressor) |
| Motivation* | <i>Personal goals</i> – curiosity and seeking common ground (stress reducing) <i>Cognitive need</i> - to find out others’ opinions (potential stressor) <i>Affective need</i> - to seek support and confirmation of reactions to the novel (potential stressor) | <i>Task oriented goal</i> – is there something ‘I can help with?’ (Reward of increased self-efficacy) <i>Cognitive need</i> – find out what other people are talking about (Potential stressor) <i>Affective need</i> – maintain a connection with the party (stress reducing) |
| Additional questions | How do race issues manifest itself in ‘this country’? What are the experiences that members had with the issues, both personally and from a work perspective? Is anyone experiencing concerning attitudes in their local areas and at constituency meetings? | What do people think about: The state of play in politics nationally and secession issues in another European country? How can ‘I bring some parity’ into the conversation? |

| | | |
|------------|---|---|
| Motivation | <p>Personal goals – wanting to find out what to do when faced with racism as a witness or victim, personally and as a party member (stress reduction and increase in self-efficacy).</p> <p>Cognitive need – knowing what course of practical action to take (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Affective need – dealing with feelings that racism engenders (coping so that stress is reduced)</p> <p>Physiological need – to be able to protect oneself in a situation of physical threat (self-efficacy)</p> | <p>Goals and needs were the same as for initial questions, with additional opportunities to contribute to debates resulting in the reward of increased self-efficacy</p> |
|------------|---|---|

In Table 4, the nature of the knowledge shared, and its motivation, is quite different in each of the two cases. In the face-to-face discussion, the knowledge shared came primarily from personal experience and one communicator shared information gained from a prior training event. The online forum was, in some ways, more cerebral, reflecting on party ethos and sharing opinions about what should be an appropriate party stance on secession, while goals and needs remained closely linked to those given for the queries asked. Knowledge was shared as a different way of gaining reactions relating to personal alignment of values with those of the party and its members. Knowledge was also shared to bring in longer term experience. Nuances in issues that might not otherwise be identified, were then uncovered. The motivation for sharing knowledge in the face-to-face discussion included communicators wanting to raise awareness, help each other recognise the reality and complexity of the issues, and confirm that work is being done more formally on issues raised. In both conversations, knowledge sharing had the rewarding effect of increasing a sense of self-efficacy, possibly due to the fact that support and advice was given and experience shared. The motivation of reducing stress was particularly noticeable in the face-to-face conversation, reflecting the tense nature of the topic.

Table 4: Application of *information exchange* component of extended model, focussing on knowledge sharing, adapted from Hanlon (2019)

| | Face-to-face discussion of novel | Online forum on secession |
|------------------|--|---|
| Knowledge shared | <p>Experiences as a foreigner in ‘<i>this country</i>’</p> <p>Personal witness of racism on public transport and through ‘<i>small-town</i>’ attitudes</p> <p>Councillor experience of constituency members wanting the party to take action in conflict with party values</p> <p>Experience and information from a previously held, formal, cross party event on hate crime</p> | <p>Reflective thoughts on the current state of play</p> <p>Opinions, beliefs and values on secession issues</p> |
| Motivation | <p>Personal goals – raise awareness, encourage reflection, help each other recognise complexity of the issues, and confirm experiences (the reward element was higher than the risk element, as the sharing generated support and confirmation among the members, thus reducing stress)</p> <p>Task oriented goals – to let members know the issues have been raised, though much still needs to be done, at party and government levels</p> | <p>Personal goals - checking alignment of values, by sharing own views and experience (there is a risk/reward element to reactions to sharing, which might increase or decrease self-efficacy)</p> <p>Task oriented goal – the more the issues are explored and debated, the better the self-efficacy for participation in more formal debates.</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| (potentially reducing stress) | Cognitive needs – to contribute knowledge to aid members in their reflection on debated views (reward of increased self-efficacy) |
| Cognitive needs – sharing may prompt new insights in response (reward from sharing, potentially stress reducing) | |
| Affective needs – support and confirmation of reactions to personal and witnessed experiences of racism, and comfort from being able to give reassurance that work is being done at higher levels (stress reducing) | Affective needs – to feel useful to fellow members (reward of increased self-efficacy) |

Table 5 features more detail on affective factors of mood, emotion and attitude and information about the type of information seeking behaviour that occurred during the conversations.

Table 5: Application of *information exchange* component of extended model, focussing on affective factors and type of information seeking behaviour, adapted from Hanlon (2019)

| | Face-to-face discussion of novel | Online forum on secession |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Mood, emotion, attitude | Easy going, open and sense of commitment to the group Strong feelings, including passion about needing to tackle racism Parliamentarians who were ‘very engaged’ on the issue were identified Negative feelings – as described in Table 1 Member from abroad still felt like an outsider, felt depressed and ‘put out’ Uncertainty and feeling overwhelmed because ‘you don’t know what to do when there’s so much’ | Dynamic and refreshing with animated mood due to deeply held views about secession (also in Table 1 in Affective factors) Fears about nationalism and its more right wing nature, while having sympathy for people not wanting to ‘pay to the centre’ Restraint due to everyone on the forum knowing each other |
| Type of information seeking behaviour | Passive attention while reading the novel, then passive search as people shared responses, before finally moving to focused active searching. | Initially passive search then increased focus leading to active searching |

In the face-to-face discussion, there was a change of mood as the communicators began to relate the topic of racism to personal and working experiences, which were concerning as was the sense of feeling overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of the issue. There was an interesting overlap with the online forum discussion on secession, as members shared fears about nationalism and perceived growth of the right wing. However the mood was described in more positive terms, as being dynamic, refreshing and animated. Perhaps this was due to the discussion being about ethos and values rather than about the day to day personal and working experiences discussed in the face-to-face conversation.

The type of information seeking behaviour reflects the development of the queries being asked (see Table 2) in that in both cases, attention was initially passive, but then as people started responding and sharing knowledge and experiences, the information seeking became more focused and active.

Tables 2-5, show a more granulated analysis and interpretation of the findings, particularly in terms of understanding information seeking, as shown by the queries and shared knowledge and their respective

motivations. The differences between the two conversations appear to reflect the nature of the topic rather than the mode of communication, although this would be an interesting area to explore further.

Component three: outcomes

Table 6 on the outcomes of the information exchange, allows for reflection after the conversations have taken place, in particular new learning, and opportunities for or barriers to support and progress on the issues under discussion. The information behaviour itself is evaluated in terms of what was achieved during the conversations. This is viewed by applying the following approaches: (i) effect on the *'picture'* of the situation (Todd, [2005](#)), (ii) emotional effects on information seeking behaviour (Savolainen, [2014](#)) and (iii) source character (Hepworth, [2004](#)).

Table 6: Application of the *outcomes* component of extended model, adapted from Hanlon ([2019](#))

| | Face-to-face discussion of novel | Online forum on secession |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| New learning | <p>Sense of breaking the ice on the issues</p> <p>Extent and variety of other members' experiences</p> <p>That others wanted to find a way to start tackling racism</p> <p>The conversation <i>'gave us all an insight into the issue or race and inclusion in a way I think that we would not have had before'</i></p> | <p>Different people's positions on secession</p> <p>The process of arriving at clarification on the issues</p> <p>Arguments and strength of feeling about the issues</p> <p>That the quality of debating was very high on the forum (unexpectedly for the participant)</p> |
| Opportunities / support | <p>Strength of feeling about wanting to <i>'tackle'</i> racism</p> <p>Reassurance that a parliamentarian was already <i>'very engaged'</i> in responding to issues of hate crime and racism</p> | <p>The online forum is seen as a dynamic platform for articulating differing viewpoints</p> <p>There may be opportunities to engage more members through the use of technology</p> |
| Challenges / barriers | <p>Feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of the issues</p> <p>Feelings of uncertainty about how best to proceed</p> | <p>Disaffection may prevent more people from engaging with the forum.</p> |
| Evaluation of information behaviour | <p>Effect on picture – clarification and verification</p> <p>Emotional effect – a desire emerged from members to expand their research into ways of tackling racism</p> <p>Source character – communicators were accessible and knowledgeable as well as being attentive listeners.</p> | <p>Effect on picture – clarification and verification of members' values and position on secession</p> <p>Emotional effect – positive experience of the online discussion has resulted in the participant continuing to expand the information search on secession and other topics which emerge from the online forum</p> <p>Source character – communicators had positive attitudes, were knowledgeable, skilled in presenting</p> |

arguments and had a good manner.

Regarding new learning, the face-to-face discussion reflected an approach of starting off a discussion and process, which was identified as needing to be continued. The learning came from the members' experiences showing the extent of racism. The online forum seemed to have moved further forward, possibly reflecting a less complex area of discussion, in that the communicators achieved clarification on positions and arguments relating to these. Furthermore, the participant learned that the communicators presented high quality arguments. The support aspects reflected the different mode of communication. In the face-to-face discussion there was, throughout, a sense of mutual support and reassurance, while the online forum was seen as a vital platform for testing out different viewpoints. Barriers related more to the topic under discussion, with the racism issues being overwhelming and ways of proceeding were still proving challenging. The main barrier identified with the online forum was that of disaffection from other communications, which might prevent other members from visiting the forum.

Thus, Tables 2-6, reflecting the new components in the extended model in Figure 1, revealed a great deal more about the behaviour of communicators in conversation, than the original analysis did.

Conclusions

The findings in the first part of the results section on the nature of informal conversations clearly reflected the unique nature of a political party, which functions quite unlike organisations where work takes place at certain times and in relatively few locations. A key reason for engaging in informal conversation, in terms of learning, was the need to strengthen capacity to influence. Communicators sought to increase self-efficacy through mutual support and engaging in information behaviours.

The application of the extended model provided additional insights into understanding the information behaviour elements of informal conversation in the political party. For example, the nature, depth and complexity of an informal conversation topic, affected the extent of, and motivation for engagement in information behaviour. Affective factors of mood, emotion and attitude were shown as vital indicators for understanding information behaviour within the conversations. Application of the model further confirmed that learning, the process of turning information into knowledge (Ford, 2015), occurred during informal conversations at least at individual and group level, due to the support and new knowledge gained.

The model, developed from the research, emerged from the information behaviour aspects of the research data. Its aspired value is to contribute to the conversation about information seeking and information sharing as they occur during informal conversations, in this case, amongst political party members, and the corresponding influencing factors. The small number of participants allowed for more in-depth interviewing. However, further research with larger samples from a range of organisations, including political parties, is needed to test and develop the model for robustness and to gain a more enriched picture of information behaviour in informal conversations.

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